SLY FOX AND SKIPPING BIRD: AN INDIAN ROMANCE

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The American Indian will stand hereafter in history as a pathetic personality; for, no matter what has been the career of the various tribes of Indians, as a race he has in fact almost disappeared. He is going to be especially interesting in the ethnological history of man, owing to the fact that he seems to be the only one of alien races that assimilates with the white with profit to both.

We are learning late in the day that many traits of character that were accredited to him as typical are not his at all, but were attributed to him merely because of the lack of intimate acquaintance with his personality; intimate acquaintance with him being prevented by his implicable defense of "his rights," through three centuries of continuous war.

That he is susceptible to the finer emotions, and not at all the stolid, stern figure of past literature, this recital of an actual Indian romance will show.

That well-known and well-liked "old time Pro," nomad of the West—Big Bill Devers, "The Tramp Poet," in his vagabondish itinerary often camped with the Indian and learned his better nature, domestic traits, and friendly spirit in the sad days of transition from a continental monarch to a picker of crumbs from the white man's bounty.

In 1887, on Col. Cody's first invasion of England, Big Bill wrote one of his characteristic letters to him and alluded to the Indian thus:

And Bill, shew him the Indian
In all his native pride
And tell "John Bull" there's much to say
Upon the Indian's side;
That prose writers and poets, too,
With prejudice have had their way
To deprecate his friendship true,
While he has had no say.
Tell him in friendship he's a friend;
In war times he's a foe,
Not to be scorned or trampled on
As each of us well know.
In hospitality to his kind
He cannot be outdone,
From the "Crow" or Ogallalla Sioux
To the Aztec of the Sun.
Tell him they are the remnants
Of a fast decaying race
That in America's past history
Will hold the premier place;
Fast driven toward the setting sun
Upon the mountain crest,
But their names will live forever
On the Waters of Wild West.

To Escape Reservation.

One of the great events on the Sioux reservations of Pine Ridge and Rosebud, after the war of 1876, was "Buffalo Bill's" visit for the purpose of choosing some warriors to travel East with him. There was eager competition among the Indians for the honor. Not only would he who went with the exhibition get a lot of money, simply for enjoying himself all season long, but he would bring back trunks full of things for trade, desirable things from the far-off cities of the white man, upon which he could proceed to grow rich, and, in addition, he would be, as long as he lived, a man of standing, one to be harkened to and envied by the untraveled. Perhaps, also, one of the great advantages was escape, for a season, from

Sly Fox.

the reservation, which must in time grow deadly dull for persons predisposed to activity.

That latter consideration, however, was not operative in the mind of Sly Fox, a gallant young Ogallalla Sioux buck, who, by the aid of mighty "log-rolling," "pipe-laying," "influence," and "pull" among the older selecting chiefs, had finally got himself into the band of chosen ones for the season of 1887. So far as he was concerned, there was no monotony on the reservation, so long as the maiden Skipping Bird was there. Though it seemed to him absurd to imagine that she lacked appreciation of his personal merits, or that she failed to realize his superiority over the impudent, intermeddling young bucks who made goo-goo eyes at her, Sly Fox would have felt easier in mind if Skipping Bird had been more explicit in stating her preferences in his behalf. He and Lean Dog, his most obnoxious rival, had an argument—with hatchets—which in its inception seemed likely to be an effective variant upon the monotony of life, but was interrupted and authoritatively called off by Red Cloud, the chief, who was "boss." Then Sly Fox moped and sulked, until the happy idea of going with the wild West and coming back rich and dazzling occurred to him.

Began to Doubt.

But after he had been enrolled among the fortunate and his fever of exultation had cooled a little, doubts began to worry him. He could get no assurance that Skipping Bird would wait for him to come back and overpower her with his wealth and magnificence. Lean Dog, he had to admit to himself, was his equal in person and ponies, as indeed were several others whom he viewed with jealous suspicion. And Skipping Bird was so exasperatingly noncommittal, according nothing more than the same shy smiles to each and all. It was by conduct like that, he said to himself, that a woman got to deserve a club; but, of course, that would be out of the question while she was still a girl, and nobody but her father, Mad Bull, had the right to club her.

Then Sly Fox evolved a good idea. To Cody he said: "Why not take Indian girl also? Show the pale faces the beauty of the Sioux maiden. There is one beauty you want. That is Skipping Bird. Take her." Bill, who is under all circumstances an earnest member of the committee on personal charms, thought well of the young buck's idea, particularly after he had taken a good look at Skipping Bird.

But when the idea was broached to Mad Bull, the girl's father, he proceeded to live up to the reputation of his name, and with engaging frankness swore that while he was not averse to contributing a squaw and a few papooses to help the show along, for a consideration, he would have the scalp of the man who tried to take away his most valued and proudest possession, Skipping Bird.

When the time came for the Sioux contingent to join the show, Skipping Bird was not among them, and it seemed to us that the squaws provided were rather older, fatter, less attractive and better stocked with papooses than any we had ever seen, though, perhaps, they may have suffered by comparison with our recollections of Skipping Bird.

"It is all right, major," said Iron Tail. "Squaws look like these make no trouble. Squaw look like Skipping Bird, all time make trouble. Red just same as white, all devils when young."

Sly Fox Was Raging.

Sly Fox would have been glad to resign his place in the Sioux contingent and remain on the reservation, when he found Skipping Bird was not going along, could he have done so without thereby making himself an object of ridicule among his people. But nobody accepts the inevitable with better grace than an Indian. Sly Fox galloped away in the troupe, imperturbable and smiling, but with bitterness, rage, and almost despair in his heart.

That year the "Wild West" went to London and spent the entire season in their famous Earl's Court encampment. Four of the Sioux braves in the outfit succumbed to accidents sustained in the arena and were laid away for their last long sleep in West Brompton Cemetery. A fifth took to his bed and bade fair to join them, not in consequence of any hurt from horse, or man, or any illness that the English medicine men could discover, but because of a young face that was always before the eyes of his heart; for the sick man was Sly Fox. Unhappily, it was not only the face of Skipping Bird that he saw, but, with her and recipients of her smiles, Lean Dog, and Big Thunder, and Black Snake, and Running

Skipping Bird.

Elk, and who shall say how many more? And sometimes he dreamed of her mercenary parent, Mad Bull, trading her off to a total stranger for great wealth in ponies and blankets. It seemed to him as if he would never get back across the great water to the reservation, and, in that case, he might just as well be on the happy hunting ground as in London or anywhere else.

The accidents and sick list worried the management, as the superstitious Indians began to fear that there was some "bad medicine" or some hoodoo in the conditions. Sly Fox's case being evidently a pure case of love sickness generating a severe nostalgia or home sickness that medical skill could not reach, "something had to be doing" beyond the usual.

Love and Appetite.

The English medicine men gave Sly Fox advice he did not follow, and medicine he would not take. His chiefs and their medicine man held a pow-wow over him, but their incantations and drum thumping did him no good. Even kindly sympathy and cheery encouragement rolled off the young buck's sick soul like water off a duck's back. Sly Fox had reached the point where he no longer cared to eat, and was indifferent whether he was painted pea-green or black.

Paul Frenzeny, the artist, as characteristically vagabondish a Bohemian as New York ever knew, was that season with the Wild West as "Pete, the Cowboy Artist," doing the same work in the arena as the cowboys, and in the intervals between performances painting pictures in his tepee that were the amazement of the people of Europe, where he remained, and is now. The case of Sly Fox interested Pete immensely. The dramatic possibilities of the situation appealed to his French blood. The apparent absurdity of fidelity to an ideal bringing to such a pass a healthy, vigorous, and otherwise sane young savage interested him as a philosopher. He essayed to reason with him, and was not a little advantaged in doing so by knowing a good deal of the Sioux language, which he had picked up during his nomadic Western life. Nevertheless, he had no better effect than any of the others. Perhaps it is just as well not to repeat his cynical line of argument. The ideal feminine, the inspiration of art, music, poesy, and religion, unattainable and ever adorable, he naturally worshiped. The realizable feminine he regarded as might be expected of a blase boulevardier. Of course it would have been ridiculous for him to speak of the ideal to a love-sick young Sioux buck.

Pete's Experiment.

Still, the Indian pined and grew weaker, periment on him, having first been pretty well assured that the young fellow had never even heard of a magic lantern. He was helped in his design by his own copious knowledge and keen artistic observations of Indian girls, and specifically aided by Nate Salsbury and Jule Keen. Knowing Skipping Bird, Nate gave Pete so close a description of her charms that he was enabled to paint a couple of excellent lantern slides. Then a man possessing a good lantern was hired to bring it, at midnight, to the Wild West camp, that Sly Fox might have a taste of "the white man's magic."

The lantern man proved to be a bright, versatile fellow, used to making a living out of public entertainment in a small way as a juggler, sleight-of-hand performer, ventriloquist, Punch and Judy showman, or even clown in a circus, upon occasion, in addition to the special line of business for which he was now engaged. With the help of Pete and one of the interpreters it was easy for him to learn the few words of Sioux which should accompany the pictures he was to show, "the patter," as he termed them, to be spoken in a girl's voice.

The Ceremonial.

The magic ceremonial came off in my log cabin long after the last outsider had left camp. Sly Fox, led by a couple of friends, was brought in and seated at one end of the cabin. In his presence, that he might see there was no deception, a great sheet was hung upon the bare logs of the farther end. At one side, pendant from a tripod, was a kettle, over a low fire, and Pete, made up as a most horrifying witch, muttered incantations—really recitations of blank verse in several languages—and from time to time he threw into the kettle small objects which flamed into various colors and sometimes produced atrocious smells. An Indian deems drum beating essential in any "medicine making," and never was that requirement better filled than by a toy drum-beating rabbit, worked by

Lean Dog.

Johnny Baker and Billy Sweeney. Well did Sly Fox know something would come of beating a drum so fast as that. And something did.

Clouds rolled over a round space that spread until it seemed as if that whole end of the cabin had melted away and the edge of the world were just outside. There, amid the clouds, a forest of pines grew clearer and clearer, so distinct at last that the Indian felt he could climb one of them. Suddenly, from behind a tree, the smiling face of a girl appeared, the face of Skipping Bird, looking in his eyes. He sprang up with a cry of joy. Instantly girl and trees vanished. The clouds rolled and whirled once more. He was told that he must keep still, or he would see her no more. Penitently he promised to be good.

Quickly she reappeared, not peeping from behind a tree, but life-size, standing out upon a grassy space, with a look of affection in her eyes and her hands extended toward him. And, seemingly from her lips, in her sweet voice, he heard, low but clear, Sioux words, that being translated meant, "Come back to me, dear Sly Fox, your Skipping Bird waits for you. Bring plenty of blankets and the mus-zis-caw (long green) and we will be happy yet."

Soon Got Rich.

Just then the witch threw something in the fire that made it blow up. The figure disappeared and for a moment there was darkness. When the lights were brought, no trace was left in sight of the white man's magic, but its work had been done. Sly Fox cried aloud, "Yes, Skipping Bird, I will come back—many blankets will I bring and heap, big heap, mus-zis-caw." The effect on his health was truly amazing, sowing clearly that, savage though he was, the Indian nature was as sensitive to the finer sentiments as his white brother when wounded by Cupid's arrow.

He became the shrewdest economist and speculator in the troupe, buying up Indian goods from his less sagacious comrades and selling them to visitors at advanced prices. He also devoted time and energy, with marvelous luck, to poker, and when he returned to the reservation it was with plethoric pockets and trunks of Paisley shawls, &c. In fact, he returned a financier, and happily married the devoted and delighted Skipping Bird.

With good health and his accumulated wealth invested in horses and cattle, and taught by his experience from traveling with the Wild West, "to follow the white man's road," Sly Fox today, with his well-preserved, proud matron, Skipping Bird, and a truly lovely, educated family, is a most prosperous and happy White River ranchman—an example of the Indian's ability to evolute with opportunity.

KISSING DAYS AT HUNGERFORD

Observance of an Ancient Custom by an English Fishing Town.

Yesterday, says a late issue of the London Evening Standard, was "kissing day" at Hungerford, a quiet community on the western borders of Berkshire, renowned for its trout fishery and its faithful adherence to the ancient customs of Hocktide, which have been observed since the days of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who granted the rights and privileges to the commoners.

At daybreak the town crier, arrayed in a new livery, took his stand on the town hall balcony and blew his lusty blasts on the historic horn, which is the symbol of Hungerfordian liberty. Then the "tuttimen" went forth bearing staves garlanded with flowers and made a perambulation of the town, kissing every lady whom they met and demanding a penny from every male householder.

The sum thus obtained served to purchase oranges for scrambling among the crowd of children who followed in their footsteps. The ladies took the kissing in good part and the males paid up smilingly.

Meanwhile the Hocktide jury was transacting more serious business in the town hall, electing a constable, who is both a coroner and a mayor, also appointing keepers of the keys of the common coffer, bailiff, portreeve, and other ancient officers whose duties are rather obscure.

Most to Be Feared.

From Fliegende Blatter.

Mother (to future son-in-law)—I may tell you that, though my daughter is well educated, she cannot cook.

Future Son-in-law—That doesn't matter, so long as she doesn't try.